

(mcgee)

GENESIS OF THE ARROW

189*

akin in function even in the superficial view of the Caucasian, and are much more closely related in primitive thought—indeed the fire-drill is but a featherless and nockless arrow, with the foreshaft charred at its fire-giving tip; and all are closely linked in language and allied with other terms in such wise as practically to establish identity among them in the thinking of their lowly makers (though unfortunately the incomplete vocabularies extant are insufficient for full study of the linguistic homologies). Briefly the indications are that the harpoon was the primary device, and that its foreshaft was a tooth of an aquatic fish-eater like the seal, or perchance in some cases an os penis; that its lineal successor was a loose-head lance for use on sea and land, at first with the unaided hand and later with the atlai, or throwing-stick (the lance being now extinct, though recorded by early visitors to Seriland); that the next artifact-generation in the direct line was represented by the arrow, foreshafted with hard wood or tooth, made light and graceful and loose-headed or not, according to needs, and by the substitution of bow for atlai; and that a somewhat aberrant line was marked by the taming of fire, its reproduction by the modified arrow, and the differentiation of fire-stick from arrow and either atlai or bow.

In tracing these stages in technologic growth, it is to be remembered that the Seri are so primitive as to betray some of the very beginnings of activital concepts; that to them zoic potencies are the paramount powers of the cosmos; that in their simple thought fire is a bestial rather than a physical phenomenon; that in their naive philosophy the production of devouring flame is of a kind with vital birth and a similitude of sexual reproduction; and that according to their notions the conquest of quarry, including fire, is made practicable only by aid of the mystical potencies of beasts and flames gained through invocatory use of symbols or actual organs.

In the Seri tongue the term "fire-drill" is *kaak*, an indefinite generic meaning "kind" or "strong kind", with an egocentric connotation ("Our-Strong-Kind"), as in the proper tribal designation *Ku-kaak* or *Ku-kaak*; while the term for the nether fire-stick or hearth is either *maam* ("woman", or more properly "mother"), or else (and more commonly) *kaak-maam*, which may be rendered "Kind-Mother"—the "Kind", as among primitive folk generally, comprising both men and tutelary beasts, and in this case fire as the most mysterious of the beasts; there is thus a suggestive analogy between the designation for the fire-producing apparatus and that for the tribe itself. It should be noted that the zoic concept of fire is widespread among the more primitive peoples of various provinces, and sometimes persists in recognizable form in higher culture (witness the fire-breathing dragons of various mythologies, the "Red Flower" notion gathered in India by Kipling, etc); also that the ascription of sex to the fire sticks is prevalent among North American tribes, and at once helps to interpret the development of the fire-drill, fire-syringe, and other primitive devices, such, for example, as

411 and seldom stirred until the stranger approached within 50 or 60 yards; whence it may be assumed that these distances fairly indicate the ordinary range of Seri arrows. The few accounts of conflicts in which arrows are mentioned prove, however, that these missiles are discharged with great rapidity and in considerable numbers during the brief interval to which the fighting is customarily limited.

278
411 The most notorious feature of the Seri warfare, and that of deepest interest to students, is the reputed use of poisoned arrows. The scattered literature of the tribe, from the days of Coronado onward, abounds in references to this custom; the Jesuit authorities give somewhat varied yet fairly consistent descriptions of the preparation and the effects of these arrows; Hardy added his testimony as to the character of the poison; General Stone gave directly corroborative evidence; hacendero Encinas gives witness to the effects of the envenomed missiles on his own stock; while Mashém recounted to the 1894 expedition the various uses of the "poisoned" arrows and highly extolled their potency, though he was noncommittal—save in casual allusions—as to the details of the poisoning. A part of the arrows acquired by this expedition and now preserved in the National Museum were professedly poisoned; they are easily distinguished by a thin varnish of gummy and greasy substance over the iron tips and wooden foreshafts, and especially about the attachments of mesquite gum and sinew. According to Mashém's asseverations, such arrows are habitually used in war save when the supply is exhausted by continued demand; they are also used occasionally in hunting, especially for deer and lions (i. e., the swiftest and fiercest game of the region); and the use of the poisoned missile does not destroy the meat of the animal, though the portion immediately about the wound is "thrown away". Two of the treated arrows brought back from Costa Rica were submitted to Dr S. Weir Mitchell some months afterward for examination, and for identification of any poisonous matter found on them; but no poison was detected. On the whole, the data concerning the reputed arrow poisoning are less definite than might be desired; yet they are sufficient to suggest the nature of the custom with considerable clearness.

278
[126] In any consideration of Seri customs it is to be realized that the folk are notably primitive in thought, and hence deeply steeped in that overweening mysticism which dominates all lowly folk—that they still cling to zoomorphic motives in their simple handicraft, and are still wholly within zootheism in their lowly faith. In the light of this realization the numerous consistent records of the preparation of the poison are easily interpreted, and are found to be fully in accord with the prevailing motives of the tribe; and the interpretation serves to explain the somewhat discrepant accounts of the effects of the poison, effects ranging from nil to horrible sepsis. According to the more circumstantial recipes, the first constituent of the poison is a portion of lung, preferably human—a selection readily explained by pristine philosophy,